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SUBJECT: MEDIA DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTHERN SUDAN

11. (SBU) Summary: CG Christopher Datta met with Minister of Information and Broadcasting Gabriel Chang on the morning of February 25 to discuss the developing media in South Sudan. Starting with almost nothing, Chang outlined an ambitious agenda for the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) to reach out to Southern audiences that included medium wave and FM radio stations and the inauguration of a new television channel on March 28th.

12. (SBU) Minister Chang briefed CG Datta on an impressive plan to expand radio and TV services to the people of the Southern Sudan. A medium wave GoSS station now covers the entire South, and FM licenses are being granted to local start-up ventures. The problem faced by the ministry is how to develop programming for these stations with little in the way of staff and financial support. The ministry is seeking to create, for example, a new news organization that can report from all parts of the South, as well as from neighboring capitals in Kampala, Addis and Nairobi.

13. (SBU) The Minister indicated he is not getting the level of cooperation from leaders in the GoSS that he would like to see in using the media to reach the people of the South with GoSS messages. They are slow, he said, to understand the power of radio in particular to reach people outside of Juba, which is badly needed. Especially in remote rural areas, little is understood of what the GoSS is doing and radio, through its power to reach this largely illiterate population, can help to inform and unite the South.

14. (SBU) CG Datta asked how quickly the licensing of private FM stations was progressing, commenting on reports that the northern government was opposed to such licensing on the grounds that the GoSS did not have the authority to issue FM licenses. The Minister answered that the central government was indeed opposed to it, but he maintained that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) did provide the authority and the GoSS was proceeding anyway. FM stations, he said, were of critical importance because, although they had only a short range, the local nature of the stations allowed them to broadcast in local languages with news and entertainment of local interest. In many areas, English and Arabic, the languages used on the medium wave station, were not understood in many rural areas and local FM stations filled the information gap. No matter what the government in Khartoum thought, they would continue to license new stations for this reason.

15. (SBU) Last, the Minister informed the CG that the GoSS would be inaugurating a new television channel on March 28. It would begin with six hours of daily programming, and seek to expand later. It would be available by broadcast in Juba, but also be available across the region to those with satellite dishes.

16. (SBU) Comment: As with almost all sectors of Southern Sudan, the Ministry of Information is starting with almost nothing and little expertise. They are learning as they go, but Minister Chang has an

impressive agenda and seems to understand the powerful role that the media can play in communicating to and uniting Southern Sudan.

FERNANDEZ